Fast & Simple Biscuit Joiner Jig

by Gord Graff

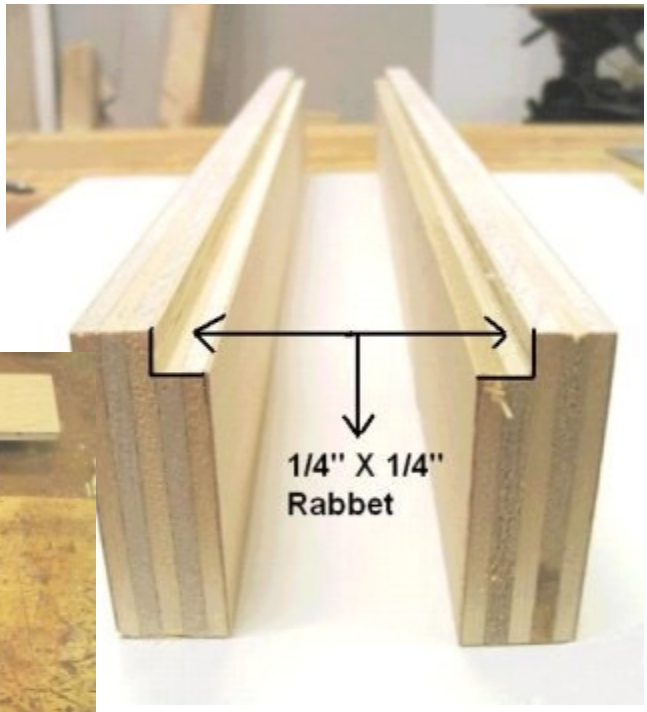
I was presenting a seminar on biscuit joinery the other night and after the class one of the attendees came to me and couldn't believe how my simple biscuit joiner jig could solve a number of problems he had. He was so amazed with the simple thing that the only thing I could do was hand it to him and say, “here you go”. After giving it away I knew that I would have to make a new one, so this morning I did just that and documented it in hopes that it may help someone else.

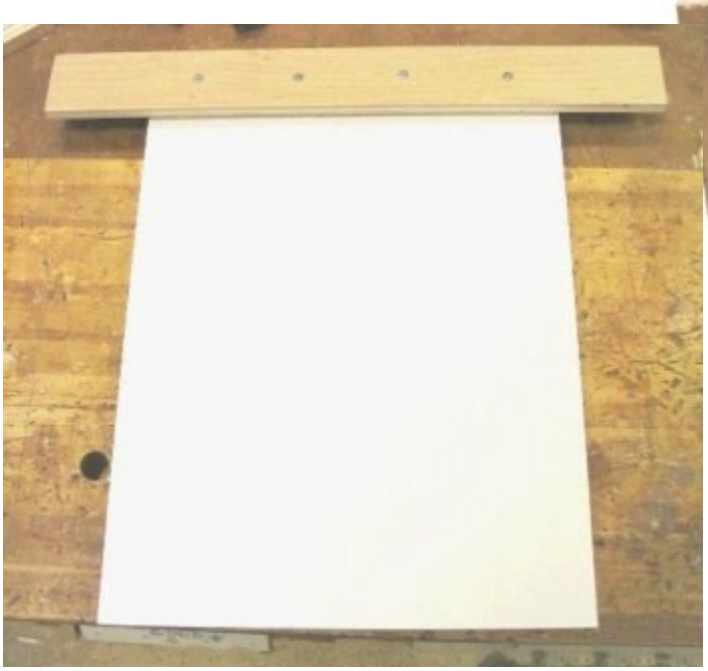
Like most woodworkers, I embraced biscuit joinery many years ago and like most woodworkers, I never seem to have enough flat usable space to register the joiner off of when joining ¾" material. Using my bench as a flat surface to register my biscuit joiner off of is a crapshoot most days as it is covered with dried on glue drops and whatnots. Would you trust this bench surface to be accurate?

My solution to this has always been a simple modified bench hook that serves a number of biscuit joinery scenarios. Not only does this jig give you a flat smooth surface to work off of when working with ¾" material, the jig's fence makes a great stop for working with thicker material when using the biscuit joiner's fence to register off of.

The jig starts off with nothing more than a piece of 12" x 16" x ¾" melamine and two pieces of 2" x 18" x ¾" plywood. With a handful of #8 x 1¼" particle board screws you have all you need to make this little jig.

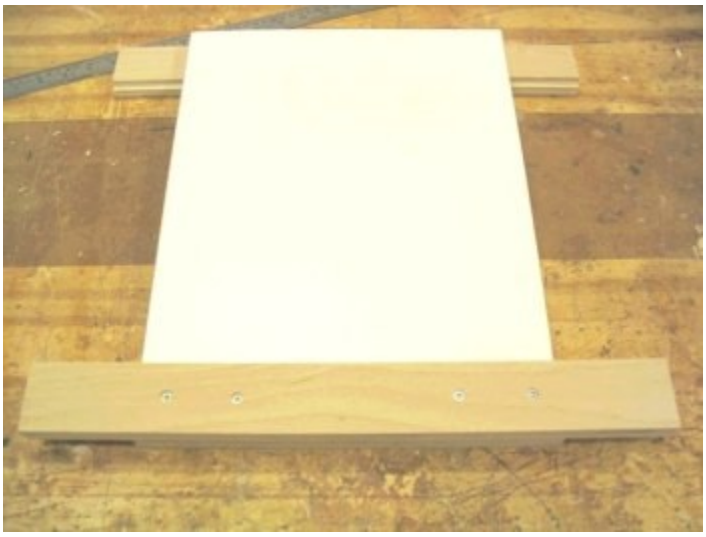
The first step is to take the 2" wide plywood and cut a ¼" x ¼" rabbet along one edge, this will act as nothing more than a place for stray dust to collect instead of the area between the fence and the work piece.

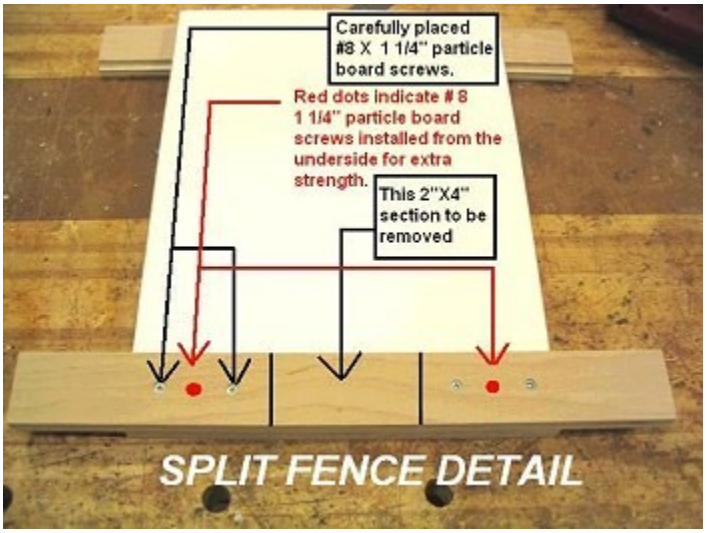




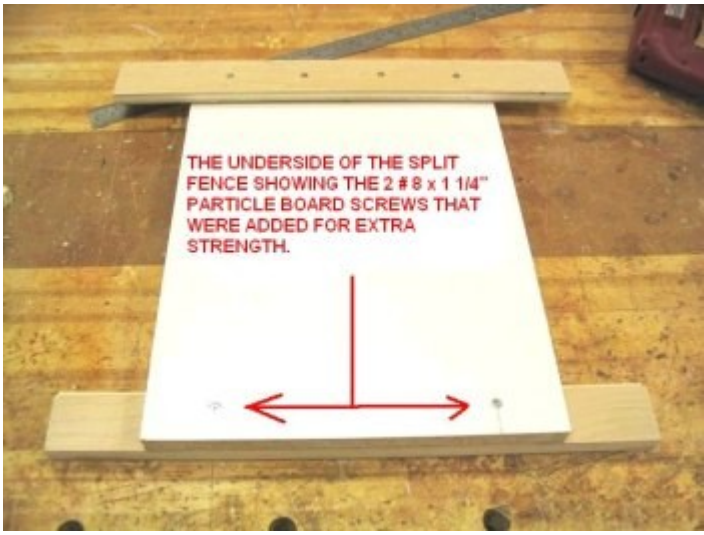
This photo shows the completed fence installed on the piece of ¾" melamine using four #8 x 1¼" particle board screws. These screws are great for biting into melamine coated particle board or plywood.

After the first plywood fence is installed, turn the piece over and install the second piece of 2" x 18" x ¾" plywood fence on the underside of the melamine, this fence will become our “split fence”. Here is what the fence should look like installed but see photo below before you start installing this fence as there are a few details (screw placement) you need to know about.

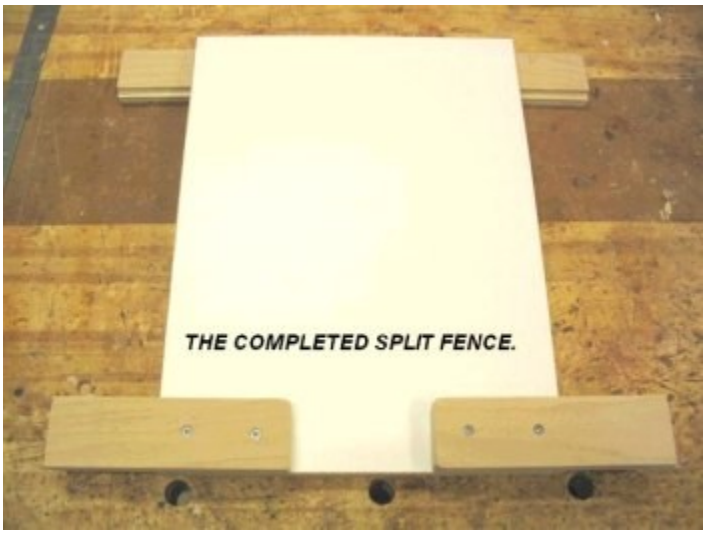




The fence is installed as one piece (screwed top and bottom) and the 2" x 4" cut-out is then marked on the fence, the fence then removed and the cut-out made. I prefer to do it this way so that the fence, when its center section is removed will go back into its original place while remaining square to the sides of the melamine.



This photo simply shows the placement of the two extra screws that are needed for extra strength in the split fence and they are installed on the opposite side to what we've been working on thus far.



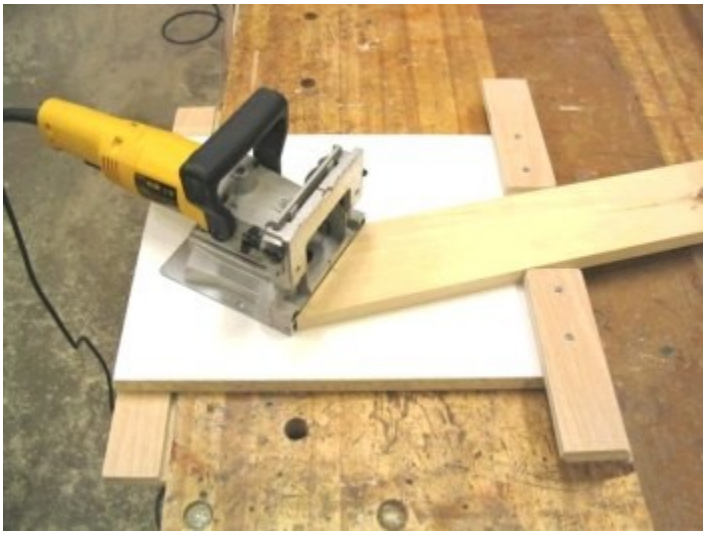
While the split fence is off the melamine having its center section removed, it's a good time to sand a small radius on the ends of the fence that border the opening. I'm going to be wedging material against these ends and I don't want them to be sharp and mar my material.

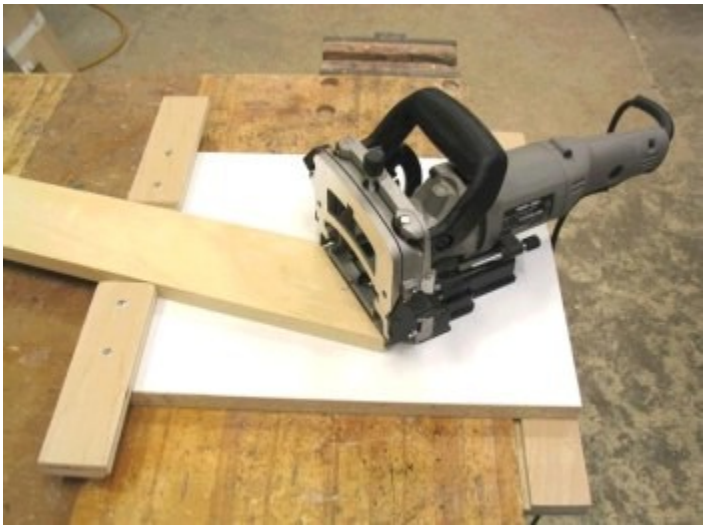
The finished split fence.

In use, here's what it looks like using the regular fence and an 8" wide board.

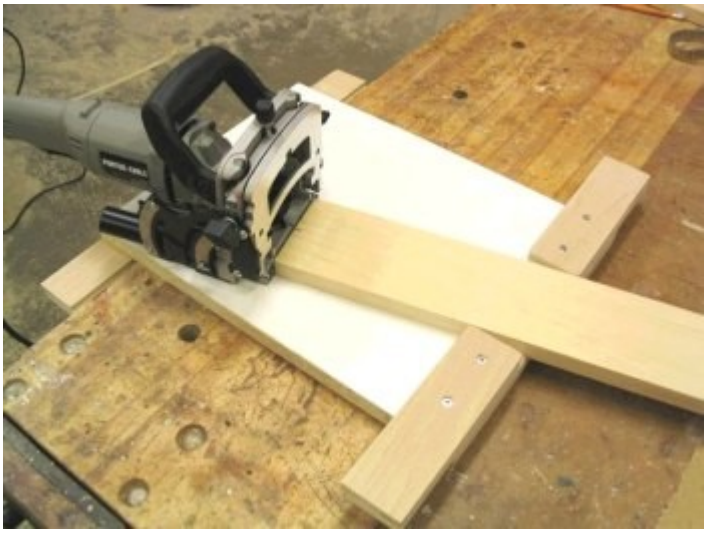
Again, using the regular fence and a 3" wide board.

Using the jig in the “split fence” mode to cut a biscuit slot in one half of a mitered joint is a breeze. The mitered 3½" wide piece of pine is simply “wedged” by mere operator pressure against the ends of the split fence to hold the piece from moving around.





Cutting the other side of the miter joint is equally easy. Note the ample room for the biscuit joiner to travel on.



Cutting a slot in the end of a 3½" wide board that's cut at a 90° angle is no big deal for this jig. All one has to do is slide the board through the split fence, wedge it into the opening by applying a little sideways pressure against both fences and cut the slot—it's that easy and it's that fast.

To say that this jig is easy to build and easy to use is an understatement, in real time, it took me no more than 20 minutes to make it.

It's my hope that this simple little jig will be able to help someone out there be a little safer, quicker and a lot more accurate than they were yesterday.